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Where are all the Socialists?

Where are all the Socialists?

Socialists are often asked the question “*where are all the Socialists*” as though the small number of Socialists to be found in the world today is a serious and insurmountable problem we cannot overcome. Such a question does not appreciate the uncomfortable political terrain Socialists have had to work in over the past century nor the obstacles that have been placed in the way of a clear working class understanding of capitalism. The consequence of these obstacles is that, at present, a majority of workers do not know how and why they are exploited in the productive process through the imposition of the institution of the private ownership of the means of production and distribution.

Nevertheless, despite these obstacles there is still the urgent need for workers to become Socialists. Socialism is a practical alternative to capitalism which would resolve the problems of poverty, poor housing, and education, lack of food and health provision. To resolve these very real social problems the working class will have to, at some point in its development, take conscious and political action as a Socialist majority and replace production for profit with the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. No one else is going to do it for them. Capitalist political parties like the Tories, Labour and Liberal Democrats do not exist to end class exploitation, poverty, social alienation and war,

Although disappointed by the slow revolutionary development of the working class, Marx and Engels never lost their optimism in the potential for the working class, through its own efforts, to abolish capitalism and establish Socialism. They both held the view that the working class was the last exploited class in human history and had the capacity to create a classless society of creative and free men and women, producing and distributing goods to directly meet human need.

In THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO Marx and Engels showed how the working class was first historically formed by capitalism into an incoherent mass blindly striking out against the circumstances in which it found itself. However, through an accumulation of experience forged from the class struggle, - “*the motor force of history*” – as Marx called it, the working class went on to form itself into trade unions, to take political action in organisations like the Chartists and finally to establish a Socialist Party. The historical development of the working class was not smooth and linear. Mistakes were made and gains once won were then lost. Nevertheless, as soon as the working class stood on its own two feet to form a Socialist Party it became a revolutionary force for social change.

And the reason why the working class is a revolutionary force for social change is not a moral one. Under capitalism production is limited to market capacity so that even at peak production, during periods of economic boom, capitalism never produces enough to meet the needs of the whole population. And in periods of economic

depression, capitalism produces still less, even though it means the absurdity of idle machinery, the destruction of unsalable commodities, empty houses despite there being a housing shortage, a rising “*industrial reserve army*” of the unemployed and unmet social need.

Marx and Engels contributed a great deal of valuable scientific understanding to Socialist theory notably the materialist conception of history, the labour theory of value and the political concept of the class struggle. And they were also politically engaged most of their adult lives as Socialist revolutionaries. They believed the conditions of capitalism, particularly the consequences of class relations in becoming a “*fetter*” on the forces of production, would create questioning, dissent, a class thinking for itself, a political class struggle and Socialists.

Over one hundred years ago Marx wrote that:

...it is not a fact that too many necessities of life are produced in proportion to the existing population. The reverse is true. Not enough is produced to satisfy the wants of the great mass decently and humanly CAPITALVol. 111)

What this means is that capitalism does not provide adequate food, clothing, housing, water and sewage systems, energy for lighting, health services and education facilities and so on for the entire population. The means of production are only used to expand value, to accumulate capital and make a profit for the capitalist class. This imperative to accumulate capital to the detriment of the majority of society is immune to social reforms and to the politics of the Labour Party or Liberal Democrats. The problem is not one of distribution or the size of the cake to be distributed but production, the ownership of production and what production is used for. Under capitalism production is used for producing commodities and making profit not in meeting human need.

Frederick Engels put the severe limitations of capitalism in perspective in a letter he wrote in 1865:

Too little is produced, that is the cause of the whole thing. But why is too little produced? Not because the limits of production are exhausted. No – but because the limits of production are determined not by the number of empty bellies but by the number of purchasers able to buy and pay for them.

This understanding of capitalism was also held by the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Socialists, particularly in the early stage of the political class struggle, could do more than spread Socialist ideas the best they could under the circumstance in which they found themselves. In the SPGB’s OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES the Party wrote about entering “*the field of political combat*” but it was not a field of their political choosing and capitalist politics had been well established by 1904. The political terrain was hostile and Socialists had to meet this challenge with equal hostility towards all the politics they found there; “*whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist*”.

What went wrong?

Looking around the world today, Socialists are as sparse on the ground as they were in Marx and Engels’s day and when the Socialist Party of Great Britain was formed at the beginning of the 20th century. The political immaturity of the working class has meant that those workers who did enter politics chose to join non-Socialist organisations like the Independent Labour Party, the Labour Party, the Liberals and even the Tories. Later thousands of workers mistakenly joined the Communist Party of Great Britain and looked to Stalin’s Russia or joined Mosley’s fascists and looked to Hitler’s Germany.

All to no avail; a central political contradiction in capitalist politics is that political parties have to canvass mass support from the working class either to get elected or to retain political power but when in government politicians have to administer capitalism in the interest of the capitalist class which necessitates repealing, ignoring or watering down promised social reforms while attacking the working class sectionally or collectively. And as “*the executive of the bourgeoisie*”, capitalist governments and politicians have to pursue the interest of the employers not the working class. Workers are attacked for not being productive, for not being competitive and for living off the “*welfare State*” while one section of the working class is often played off against another section of the working class with varying degrees of success.

The inability of the Labour Party in particular to combat the laws of the capitalist system has led to a large degree of apathy and cynicism. Politically, the working class are currently hopelessly fragmented with one section of the working class blaming another section for the social and economic problems they face. Even though political parties and politics are now held largely in contempt politicians can still divide and rule. Look how easy it has been for newspapers like the DAILY MAIL to turn workers in the private sector against workers in the public sector over differences in pay and working conditions or for David Cameron and George Osborne to divide workers into “*strivers and shirkers*” or for the coalition government and the media, including the BBC’s “*poverty porn*” programmes like WE PAY YOUR BENEFITS, (July 2013), in order to play-off workers in employment against those having to receive “*State benefits*”.

Another problem, following the contempt held by many workers for capitalist political parties and capitalist politics in particular, is that fewer and fewer workers bother to join trade unions and social reformist parties. Instead workers entry into politics is fragmented and isolated, with millions joining single issue pressure groups, signing on-line petitions to governments, taking part in charities and passing through the dead end politics of direct action and lists of immediate demands pursued by the anarchists and various Trotskyist organisations.

Should socialists be alarmed? Is there a problem? How can it be resolved? Socialists are not alarmed although we are disappointed as Marx and Engels were, by the failure of the working class during the 20th century to produce a fast flowing and growing Socialist movement. However with “*sober senses*” we can reflect on what went wrong and the lessons to be learned.

Although there have been many political obstructions to the development of class consciousness during the last century, four particular barriers have caused serious problems. First, the Social reform and nationalisation programme of the Labour Party which was described as “*Socialist*”; second, Leninism and the state capitalist policies of the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1991; third, religion and nationalism which have done so much to divide the working class; and fourth the counter-propaganda of the capitalist media which constantly but erroneously states that Marx’s ideas have been discredited, Communism has been tried and failed, and the “*Socialist*” policies of the Labour Party, from nationalisation to Keynesian management of the economy have also demonstrably failed.

However, Socialists have nothing to apologise for. The Socialism of Marx and the Socialist Party of Great Britain has never been established to have failed. The failure of Leninism and the policies of the Labour Party are not a failure of Socialism but a failure of nationalisation or state capitalism. The failure of Keynesianism merely showed that governments cannot manage the economy. Organised religion and nationalism may still be a problem but in an increasingly scientific world with new forms of communications like the internet and other forms of social media bringing workers closer and closer to see their shared economic and political interest, Socialists are still optimistic.

Capitalism can never be made to run in the interest of all society and the barriers preventing Socialist ideas and from workers understanding capitalism are not insurmountable. Leninism, for example, has become history while the transformation of the Labour Party from a trade union pressure group into an political instrument of capitalist rule now makes them indistinguishable from the Tories and other capitalist political parties. Therefore the soundness and validity of our Socialist case against capitalism case remains no matter what our current size.

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Will Capitalism Last Forever?

Will Capitalism Last Forever?

Every ruling class believes it is going to last forever. The crucifixion of 6000 slaves following the failed slave uprising led by Spartacus in 73-72BC by the victorious Roman Army all the way back along the Appian Way from Capua to Rome was to demonstrate the power and glory of Imperial Rome. A few centuries later the Roman Empire had vanished.

Likewise Richard II said to the serfs, following the end of the Peasant Revolt of 1381; “*Slaves you are and slaves you shall remain forevermore*”. A few centuries later Feudalism was being replaced by capitalism. The Divine Right of Kings was ended with a swing of an executioner’s axe on a cold January morning in 1649. And the ruling class in the Soviet Union believed it was on the “*progressive*” track of history when in fact it was destroyed in 1991 by the economic laws of capitalism when its increasingly inefficient and bureaucratically-laden industries were unable to compete on the world capitalist market. And to give a more modern slant on this misplaced triumphalism the investor, Warren Buffett in a November 2006 interview in THE NEW YORK TIMES, stated that:

[t]here’s class warfare all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.

Is the capitalist class winning the class war? Defenders of capitalism can say what they like about capitalism, ill-informed as it often is, because they currently enjoy the power and position to do so since the ideas that currently prevail today are the ideas of the ruling class. And these ideas are pumped out from the media, schools, the universities, capitalist political parties, advertising, and so on.

It was Marx who pointed out:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force (GERMAN IDEOLOGY)

However, the claims justifying capitalism lasting forever are made with no understanding and insight into the underlying contradictions between the forces of production and the class relationships of production. We only have to consider the economists. David Romer is the Herman Royer Professor of Political Economy at University of California. He recently gave a paper at a conference held by the IMF to discuss what caused “*The Great Recession*”, as it is called in economic circles. Romer believed that “*The Great Recession*” was caused by external shocks to the financial area of the economy and it was nothing to do with the capitalist production process itself which, he believes with almost theological faith, is an otherwise stable system of market harmony governed by Adam Smith’s invisible hand. And this, perhaps, explains why free market economists are in the forefront of being climate change deniers. They cannot accept that capitalist activity and the profit motive can have a negative effect on society either through the movement of the periodic trade cycle with its crises and periodic high levels of unemployment or with the despoliation of the environment, global pollution and climate change.

Not that the capitalist class and their media outlets are happy with the pronouncements of the economists. The journalist, Joe Joseph, writing in THE TIMES (11.03.13), on the entrenched economic depression said:

Normally you’d ask a few clever economists to make some sense of all this, but nobody trusts what even Nobel-winning economists say any more after listening to all their inconclusive squabbling over how best to get the world out of its economic quagmire. You get the feeling that people have no more faith in economists than they do in the Forecasting Fairy who just shouts out random numbers like an unfussy diner ordering a Chinese takeaway

Quite so. Professor Romer, as with economists generally, would find it incomprehensible that the buying and selling of commodities for profit can periodically lead to economic turmoil. He would not accept that economic laws acting on capitalism would mean periodic economic crises and trade depressions in which large volumes of unsalable commodities, like cars, houses, and building materials and so on would stockpile despite human need for them. He is welded to the irrational belief that capitalism is benign and harmonious.

This is not the case with Marx, who showed that commodity production and exchange for profit is highly unstable, anarchic and prone to periodic economic crises and trade depressions. As early as the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, Marx described capitalism’s contradictions as the “*revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production*”, leading to “*an absurdity – the epidemic of over-production*” in which “*Society finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism*”, (THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AND THE LAST 100 YEARS, Socialist Party of Great Britain p. 65, 1948).

Marx gave a very important reason for this state of affairs:

The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property.... (loc cit. p. 65-66)

And:

The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand, by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented (loc citp.66).

How do we overcome the contradictions and conflicts at the heart of commodity production and exchange for profit; how do we overcome this "revolt" of the productive forces "*against society itself*", as Marx put it? This is **the** question that confronts the working class today, as world capitalism continues to pass through one of the most severe economic depressions since the 1930's; an anti-social system that generates life-threatening environmental problems and causes war and conflict all over the globe.

It is a question which confronts each generation of the working class. It is a question which confronted the working class in embryonic form in 1848 when Marx and Engels published THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO. The question remained as the working class developed and matured over the next seven decade's right up to 1904 when workers, through their own initiative, founded the Socialist Party of Great Britain. And it is a question that has continued to confront the working class in every decade since Socialists set out a political programme leading to a Socialist objective.

The problems caused by the contradictions and conflicts at the heart of capitalist production and exchange for profit will not go away. The capitalist class in their search for profit will not leave the working class alone. There is no respite; no place to hide. The solution to the question of the conflict between the social relations of production and the forces of production requires the working class to become a "*class for itself*", and for workers to consciously and politically confront the reality of capitalism, – "*that it is a fetter on production*" (Marx) – a "*fetter*" that presses home that Socialism is both a practical and necessary alternative to capitalism.

Take the example of work. In a Socialist society people would work creatively and co-operatively together to produce useful things society needed. There would be no buying and selling of labour power, no labour market and no employment. However, under capitalism this is not the case. Workers are employees; they are in employment and exploited within the wages system.

Capitalism's priority of profit-making means that workers who are unprofitable to employ are made redundant despite the economic and social cost this might mean for workers and their families. Capitalism restricts the forces of production including social and co-operative labour to the demands of the market and profit. Capitalism is not interested in meeting people's needs but in accumulating capital, expanding value and making a profit. Look at the problem of global unemployment as a by-product of economic crises and depressions. Unemployment is an intractable economic problem capitalists and their politician cannot resolve. Each year for the past decade unemployment in the world has risen. The number of unemployed worldwide rose by 4.2 million in 2012 to over 197 million, a 5.9 per cent unemployment rate, according to GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT TRENDS 2013.

In a rational society those 197 million workers would be producing useful things directly for people. The reason they are not producing goods and services directly for human consumption is because the same contradictions and conflicts between the social relations of production and the social forces of production exist in capitalism just as they did in previous social systems like Feudalism and Chattel Slavery. The anti-social use of the means of production and distribution by the capitalist class not only creates severe social and economic problems but also creates the class struggle, Socialists, Socialist ideas and Socialist movement albeit at is present slow pace.

YOU COULDN'T MAKE IT UP

The novelist Bram Stoker has alerted authorities to an illegal Romanian immigrant who, with a group of gypsies, has landed at Whitby Bay Harbour, Yorkshire. Worried medical experts have warned that this Transylvanian vampire will lead to a depletion of blood supplies in the female population, the wasteful growth of garlic; a nefarious practice associated with the French, and the loss of precious woodland in the production of stakes and crucifixes. Apparently the illegal immigrant, who has some connection with royalty, has already moved into Highgate Cemetery, London where he is currently squatting in a coffin not a stone's throw away from the grave of another immigrant, the notorious Socialist revolutionary, Karl Marx (DAILY MAIL, July 1897, sent by carrier pigeon by Richard Littlejohn following a prolonged liquid lunch in the saloon bar of "The Victorian Values" somewhere in the depths of Essex

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Socialism or Nationalism

The establishment of World Socialism through the conscious and political action of a Socialist majority is faced with a number of temporary but not insurmountable obstacles. One obstacle is the present support given by the working class for the interests of the capitalist class over a wide range of economic and political issues. This support often manifests itself in an expression of nationalism and patriotism in which workers believe that they have some vested interest in a particular country and under certain circumstances will either die or kill other workers.

What is the "*national interest*"? Why do workers erroneously believe they have an economic and political interest in a particular country? And why do these interests have no bearing on the interest of the working class?

To answer these questions consider Britain. Britain is an island off mainland Europe containing natural resources, factories, offices, farms, mines, docks, buses and trains and distribution points. Who do these means of production belong to? They do not belong to the white working class membership of the English Defence League under the misguided illusion they have something to defend. Nor do they belong to the workers in the British National Party raging at the world for the poverty and alienation of their inner-city existence any more than they belong to the working class in general no matter where they have originally come from. In fact, workers have class interests diametrically opposed to the capitalists and their politicians.

In not owning the means of production and distribution, workers are forced to sell their ability to work as a commodity in exchange for a wage or a salary. The working class includes those who are dependent on someone in employment as well as the 4 million self-employed workers. The working class form the majority class in society and are forced to enter into the labour market to search for a job. Workers, in short, are imprisoned within the coercive and exploitive wages system where they soon discover from an early age what their wages can buy and what they and their families need to live on are altogether two completely different things.

The social and economic problems facing the working class are not caused by other workers but by the wages system. On a daily basis workers are in a class struggle with employers over the extent and intensity of exploitation. Workers have an interest in getting the highest wage possible while employers want to drive wages down and increase productivity. In reality the class struggle is a political struggle over the ownership of the means to life.

The problem for the working class is capitalism not migrants and workers living in other countries. Poor housing and education, the struggle to find employment and having little or no control over a worker's life is a consequence of capitalism and the profit motive not workers who have come from Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Pakistan, Somalia or somewhere else in the world.

Competition is a fact of life under capitalism and workers are forced to compete on the jobs market for work and to

constantly compete in employment to keep their jobs. If Britain had a wholly white working class exploitation, would still take place, workers would still be made redundant and they would still have to struggle for housing and other important necessities of life. All workers have identical class interests, they form one class and they take part in the same class struggle.

The means of production and distribution are owned by the capitalist class. The capitalist class live off the unearned income of rent, interest and profit. They live a life of luxury and privilege. The top 10% of households are now 850 times wealthier than the bottom 10% GUARDIAN 3rd December 2012).

And as the SUNDAY TIMES RICH LIST (21st April 2013) has recently shown, the richest 1,000 persons in the UK, just 0.003% of the adult population has increased their wealth by no less than £35bn in the last year alone. Since the economic crises in 2008 their wealth has risen to £190bn. All told their collective total wealth has now reached £449bn. Just 200 are now worth £318bn, while the richest 100, only 0.0003% of adults, now have wealth estimated at £257bn – in other words each of them on average possesses wealth exceeding £2.5bn. There are now 88 billionaires in Britain, 11 more than the year before.

Capitalism is a system that accords with the interests of the capitalist class and they do very well from the profit system. Workers, therefore, do not have any country to support or to die for. As Marx pointed out perceptively in “THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO”:

The working men have no country. We cannot take away from them what they have not got

National Interest versus Class Interests

Nation states contain a capitalist class owning the means of production and distribution with competing political and economic interests, political institutions and a coercive machinery of government to protect private property from internal or external threats. Nation states also contain a working class who own nothing but their ability to work which they are forced to sell to the capitalists for a wage or salary. Within every country of the world social wealth is created by the working class. The working class are exploited in the productive process by producing more social wealth in a week or a month than they receive back in wages and salaries.

All nations of the world are capitalist economies within a world-wide capitalist system. Workers have no interest in the capitalist class who exploit them; they have no trade routes to protect, no raw resources to secure and no strategic spheres of influence to defend. A world capitalist class confronts a world working class over the ownership of the means of production and distribution. Workers throughout the world share the same class interests, take part in the same class struggle and share the same political need to consciously and politically replace World Capitalism with World Socialism.

This also includes the latent trans-European nationalism associated with those bureaucrats and politicians within the European Union who want to establish a United States of Europe. Early advocates of a United States of Europe included Victor Hugo, Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Liberal J. S Mill and the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin but more recently a unified European State has been championed by, among others, the former Belgium Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt in his book, “UNITED STATES OF EUROPE” (2005). The EU project is a long way off from achieving its objective of a political union and an integrated State along the lines of the US, if it ever does, given the political divisions it faces. The recent problems with the single currency and the bitter nationalism unleashed in countries forced to accept harsh austerity programmes leaves the project somewhat in tatters.

Over the question of the United States of Europe the capitalists and their political agents are bitterly divided. The question of increased European integration and a European State is largely a political not an economic one; and it is a question of no concern to the interests of the working class. Capitalism, operating with all its contradiction and conflicts either within a United States of Europe or within individual nation states, is still an exploitive profit driven system leaving the means of production and distribution firmly in the hands of the capitalist class.

Capitalists and their politicians seldom agree over a wide range of economic and political issues of what constitutes

“the national interest”; from joining the Euro to what energy or transport policy to pursue. They are even divided during a war. In both the First and Second World War some members of the capitalist class were bitterly opposed to war with Germany. During the late 1920’s and 1930’s both US and Britain prepared for war against each other. The US even drew up plans in 1930 to bomb the main cities of Canada as part of a war plan to destroy the British Empire. There were opponents within the capitalist class of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Conservative supporting newspapers like the DAILY MAIL have opposed involvement in conflicts taking place in Libya and Syria.

The fundamental struggle in the world is not a nationalist struggle but a class struggle. The class struggle is a political struggle and it is the class struggle that politically moves one social system to the next. Socialists do not support one nation state against another. We do not support nationalist struggles any more than we support the Welsh and Scottish nationalists who want to cede from Britain.

However, Socialism will not come by its own accord. Social systems change through the political action of men and women. The establishment of Socialism is no exception. Only a Socialist majority can establish Socialism. This means that Socialists have to persuade workers to pursue the Socialist objective in line with their own class interest and not give support to capitalist politicians. The national interest is not the working class interest. The national policies of the capitalist parties are not policies workers should support.

Fictional Histories

The teaching of history inculcates the belief in nationalism and *“my country right or wrong”*. The current Minister for Education, Michael Gove, wants children to learn by rote the dates of kings and queens and *“important”* national events (*1066 and all that*) to give a sense of national continuity and belonging.

Left-wing nationalism has a long history but is strongly identified with Joseph Stalin who promoted a nationalist concept called *“revolutionary patriotism”* in the Soviet Union. Stalin appealed for nationalism and *“Mother Russia”* during the Second World War. The former Yugoslavian dictator, Josip Tito also expressed left-wing nationalism in an attempt to promote unity between the Yugoslav nations and asserting Yugoslavia's independence.

Trendy left wing teachers and academics have recently stressed a different nationalist emphasis on the teaching of history. They want to celebrate, among other things, the nurses serving soldiers in the Crimea War and non-white crew members fighting on board Nelson’s flag-ship *“Victory”* at the Battle of Trafalgar as suitable historical role models for students. Others want a *“national curriculum”* which includes mention of soldiers from India or the West Indies in accounts of battles fought in the First and Second World War while ignoring Socialists who opposed both wars and, who were, as a result, imprisoned, harassed and attacked for their Socialist principles.

Some of the worst nationalist tracts have been written by those professing to be Socialists. It beggars belief that George Orwell is still held up as a paragon of Socialist virtue when his nationalist writings during the Second World War amount to nothing more than chauvinistic propaganda. Essays like MY COUNTRY RIGHT OR LEFT and THE LION AND THE UNICORNhe , could never have been written by a Socialist. And his article NOTES ON NATIONALISM trawls in every conceivable political position on nationalism except his own (Orwell regarded his love of Britain as *“patriotic”* rather than *“nationalist”*). And it is conveniently forgotten that he denounced *“enemies of the nation”* in 1949 handing *“a little list”* to the Labour government; a good English patriot! Just what is Socialist about the English patriot, George Orwell? No wonder the Tories want to hold him as *“one of their own”*.

Orwell was right that there were those in the Communist Party of Britain during the 1930’s and 1940’s who transferred their nationalistic and patriotic affection from Britain to another country; Stalin’s Russia. The spies like Kim Philby and Anthony Blunt come to mind. One historian, Eric Hobsbawn, gave support to the Soviet Union on the spurious grounds that it contributed to the defeat of Fascism as though that annulled the show trials, torture, gulags and firing squads of millions of political prisoners. Stalin’s purges led to the death of 20,000 million people (necrometrics.com). Socialists who rejected all war based on the basis of class interest are conveniently ignored and written out of history despite enduring discomfort and imprisonment.

Patriotism and nationalism in the teaching of history is itself a battle ground fought by all governments desperate for the imposition of a politics of national inclusion, cohesion and collective belonging. All very conservative with a small “c” since the pursuit of a fictional patriotic discourse is applicable to all the three main political parties, Tory, Liberal Democrat and Labour, as they struggle to present a nationalist image reflecting the ideas and beliefs of their respective political organisations.

Politicians and historians paint a picture of nation states as though they were natural events. When Thatcher rejected the notion of “*society*” she went on to assert that only “*nations and families*” unfold out in a continuous and natural trajectory through time. However, nations are not natural but historical sites of class exploitation which arose out of the development of capitalism in the 16th century.

It was amusing to have watched the UKIP leader, Nigel Farage, silenced in a debate on Bulgarian television, when it was pointed out to him that his ancestors had come to Britain in the late 17th century as persecuted Huguenots. Workers are often forced to become migrants in search of employment either within a nation state or all over the six continents of the world. Nationalist history is of course a fictional history used by the capitalist class and its politicians to divide the working class and unite sections of the workers to support the political and economic interests of the employers against foreign competitors or nation states (see PATRIOTISM: THE

MAKING AND UNMAKING OF BRITISH NATIONAL IDENTITY, ed. R. Samuel, 1989 particularly the opening paper, *The Figures of National Myth* by R. Samuel pp. xi to xxxvi)). Take, for example, the question of historical dates in the teaching of history to school children. Historical dates are only significant because they carry political weight and importance for a ruling class. The serfs in England who were exploited in 1065 when the Saxon ruling class ruled the country were still being exploited in 1067 after the Norman Conquest of 1066. The Magna Carta of June 1217 was a Baron’s victory charter whose text was appropriated as a national icon by subsequent ruling classes and has no relevance to the interest of the working class. 1688 may have been a “*Glorious Revolution*” for the aristocracy, financiers and rising capitalist class but not for an emerging working class. And August 4th 1914 may have started a historical process which would see the British Empire wane and its ruling class increasingly become small-time players on a world capitalist market but for the working class majority supporting the out-break of war in the interest of another class, it was disastrous day for the Socialist movement. Dates conveniently omitted from the proposed National History Curriculum will be the Putney debates (1647), the establishment of the Chartist Movement (1838) and the English translation and publication in 1850 of the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO.

The Capitalist Left and Nationalism

If Socialists reject all nationalism this is not the case with the capitalist left who support nationalist struggles and nationalism. The capitalist left gives its support to nationalist movements who are opposed to “*US Imperialism*” or Western capitalism. The capitalist left might dislike the nationalism associated with non-Socialist working class support for British capitalism but find no difficulty in being nationalist cheerleaders for countries who are the enemies of the US or Western capitalism. The Stop the War movement supports the Palestinian struggle against Israel and is currently debating who to support in Syria as long as it is not a group supported by Britain or the US.

Every barbaric anti-working class nationalist movement with its attendant policies of genocide has found supporters within the capitalist left; support for the Viet Kong in Vietnam, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Castro’s dictatorship in Cuba, Chairman Mao’s totalitarian state in China, various African nationalist movements, the actions of radical Islamic groups, terrorists like Hezbollah from Palestine, the list goes on and on. Apologies are made for death, rape, torture and human misery on the specious grounds of “*your enemy is my friend*”.

An example of this uncritical and slavish support for nationalist liberation struggle can be read in the booklet, HOW MARXISM WORKS (1986 p. 68) by the Socialist Workers Party’s former leading theoretician, the late Chris Harman whose Party’s historian deliberately write the SPGB out from history; a political organisation who dismiss us as an irrelevant groupuscule. Harman wrote that in the chaos and turmoil of nationalist struggle and civil war: “*the working class can take the leadership of all other oppressed classes and seize control of whole countries*” p. 69. The basis for this erroneous assertion is V I Lenin’s theory of Imperialism to be found in his notorious “STATE AND REVOLUTION” published in 1917 in which he distorted the revolutionary ideas of Marx and Engels to suit his own

anti-Socialist ends.

Socialists reject Lenin's theory of Imperialism and its bogus caricature of a privileged working class – "*an aristocracy of labour*" – benefitting from Imperialism with higher wages and social reforms at the expense of other workers elsewhere in the world. We say that in developing capitalist countries where there is no vote, workers should not confuse their own class interests with those of a potential ruling class.

In many developing countries an emerging working class confronts ruthless dictatorships who impose censorship, threaten political opponents and imprison trade unionists. In these circumstances it is difficult for workers to organise but they must nevertheless struggle to organise in trade unions and in a principled Socialist Party with Socialism and only Socialism as its objective.

Workers in developing countries must avoid conflating their own interests from nationalist organisations struggling for power. Socialists in developing capitalist countries should oppose all other political parties and so-called "*democratic movements*" to keep alive the case for Socialism as a separate political proposition in its own right. The working class should reject the concept of political leadership. They do not need leaders and the led. Socialists can and should act and think for themselves which is the last thing the SWP leadership want for the working class.

The Political Parties and Nationalism

The Conservatives have long presented themselves as the party of nationalism and patriotism. The case for Conservative nationalism was expressed by the late Lord Hailsham

Conservatism is not so much a philosophy as an attitude, a constant force, performing a timeless function in the development of a free society, and corresponding to a deep and permanent requirement of human nature itself... Conservative philosophy does lay a most particular stress upon the duty of loyalty and the sentiment of patriotism... The nation, not the so-called class struggle, is therefore at the base of Conservative political thinking THE CASE FOR CONSERVATISM Penguin 1959

Mrs. Thatcher tapped into nationalist prejudice when, in an interview with Granada's WORLD IN ACTION (January 27th 1978), she claimed that she sympathized with the views that: "*People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture*".

Then there was the bucolic and sentimental vision, offered by John Major when he was Prime Minister, of an England: "*... of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and - as George Orwell said - 'old maids cycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist'*".

However, the Liberals, later the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party have all immersed themselves in nationalist propaganda when it suits their political interests. The Labour Party has not only supported the British Empire and used nationalism to galvanise support from workers in two World Wars but it also used nationalist propaganda in recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan by misleadingly presenting both conflicts in the "*national interest*"; that is in the interest of the whole population.

Under Blair's premiership the Union Jack was introduced in the Party's logo at conferences and at elections in an attempt to vie with the Tories for the nationalist vote. And at the 2012 conference, Ed Milliband stood in front of a blue stage-backdrop and fluttering Union Jack to bask in the imagery of one nation Toryism. Goebbels would have been impressed. After all, he had written a truth about capitalist politics:

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State

During the last Labour administration Gordon Brown was forced to assert: "*Can anybody here say that they don't*

want *British workers to get jobs in our country?*" (DAILY TELEGRAPH 4th February 2009). His speech was in response to thousands of workers at around 20 construction sites and refineries across Britain walking out in an unofficial strike claiming "*foreign workers are taking the jobs of British workers*".

The slogan used by the strikers was "*British jobs for British workers*" used in a speech by Gordon Brown's to the 2007 Labour Party conference. Of course, there is no such thing as "*British jobs*" any more than there are "*Polish jobs*" or "*Italian jobs*". Capitalists will move industries elsewhere in the world to tap into cheaper labour costs and encourage immigration for the same reason. The real problem for the working class is not jobs, not workers from other countries but the wages system and capitalism.

At the 2012 Labour conference, without a shadow of embarrassment, Ed Miliband advocated a "*one nation*" politics in which class conflict was repudiated to be replaced by national unity and collective purpose. He said: "*We must have a one-nation banking system as part of a one-nation economy.*" The Labour leader cited as his inspiration the former Conservative Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, who made a similar speech on One Nation Conservatism in Manchester's Free Trade Hall (BBC NEWS2 October 2012).

There can never be a "*one-nation economy*". The working class cannot be split along "*cultural*" lines when, all workers are excluded from the ownership of the means of production and distribution. Capitalism is a worldwide system of class exploitation and an economy separate and distinct from the rest of the world is meaningless. No capitalist country is an isolated and self-sufficient island. And while there is the private ownership of the means of production and distribution the class struggle will continue despite the "*One Nation vision*" from politicians like Ed Miliband, the chauvinism of Brown and Thatcher and the mythical nationalist fictions of John Major and George Orwell.

World Socialism: no Artificial Barriers

Capitalism has created communication systems which have shrunk the planet. The internet and other social media have bought the whole world's population readily into contact with each other. Communication and transport networks have made global production and distribution easier. A society of abundance has long since been possible and will form the material basis of a Socialist society. Socialism will release the forces of production including social and cooperative labour solely to meet the need of all society.

Socialists do not envisage cultural uniformity but there is more that unites human beings than divides them. There is a universal need for shelter, food, housing, creativity and so on. Human beings are both social and co-operative and can work together to produce and distribute goods to meet human need.

Acceptance by workers of the very idea of Socialism – a world-wide integrated system of common ownership and democratic control of production and distribution by all of society – necessitates a rejection of all nationalism. "*National Socialism*" is a contradiction in terms while you cannot have "*Socialism in one country*" any more than you can have an insulated "*national economy*". Decisions within Socialism will be democratically made.

Socialists do not say that Socialism will be problem free. There will be hard decisions to be made particular in the early years of a Socialist society. However the democratic and co-operative social organisations along with the will of a Socialist majority will be an asset to Socialism which capitalism can never have at its disposal. And Socialism will also release the creative potential of the workers from the imprisonment of the labour market and wages system to ensure: "*from each according to their ability to each according to need*".

POLITICS

... the capitalists are far more aware of the importance of political action than are the workers. They sponsor and finance vast campaigns to ensure that governments are formed that will protect their privileged position. So great is their interest that in modern nations they control not only the government but also the greater part of the opposition.

This leaves the workers with little prominence to choose from other than the various parties which, with slight differences dictated by sectional capitalist interests, all represent the capitalist class...But there is an alternative. It is not necessary for the workers to continue supporting parties that represent interests opposed to their own. They can when they choose look beyond the noise and the deceit that draw their attention at present. It will require some interest in politics. It will require some thought and study – far more than is now shown. But every moment of it will be worth the effort for it leads unerringly toward a system of society that will rid mankind once and for all time of the terrors and uncertainties that are so much a part of working class life under capitalism

POLITICS, Socialist Party of Great Britain April 1962 pp. 23-24

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What Would Marx Say?

For the anti-socialists, the fall of the Berlin Wall meant that Adam Smith and free-market capitalism had won and Marx and Socialism/Communism had lost. The late Lord-Rees Mogg, former editor of the TIMES announced with great pomposity that: *“Marx is dead as a prophet. He is kaput”* INDEPENDENT 5th February, 1990)

THE NEW YORK TIMES also wrote that *“capitalism has won”* (quoted in J. Slovo, HAS SOCIALISM FAILED? London, 1990, p.7)

Defenders of capitalism claimed that the failure of state capitalism in Russia, which they misleadingly referred to as *“Communism,”* revealed Western capitalism to be the most efficient way yet to produce and distribute goods.

Former members of the Communist Party of Britain either embraced the New Labour politics of Tony Blair or became *“Fellows”* of pompous sounding Policy Institutes like Demos.

In the PEARS CYCLOPAEDIA of 1995 the author, while acknowledging the existence of capitalism, sneered at the failure of Russian State capitalism by pointing out that for most of the Twentieth Century defenders of the Bolsheviks were always claiming that *“capitalism was involved in its death throes”* but it was State Capitalism that perished not the capitalism of Western Europe.

In the 1996 World Development Report, the World Bank quoted in its introduction the following passage from THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO:

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away; all new-formed ones become antiquated before they ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind...The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the whole bourgeoisie across the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, and establish connections everywhere

The quotation was meant to be ironic since the report looked at the way in which market reforms were being introduced into the former Soviet Bloc countries with whole-sale privatisation of State industries and the establishment of a stock exchange and other financial and commercial institutions.

Fukuyama’s rhetorical remark *“the end of history”* celebrating the victory of US capitalism over the USSR was immediately seized upon by the cluster of Free-Market Think Tanks which encircle the White House in Washington. With the collapse of the Berlin Wall and Fukuyama’s vulgar Hegelian twist on historical events, defenders of capitalism saw their chance to try to remove all traces of Marx’s ideas from economics, history, and politics.

And this pathological obsession to *“get-Marx”* has not stopped despite the world passing through one of the worst economic depressions in capitalism’s history and growing international tensions around the globe; in the Middle East, Afghanistan, in the Pacific between China and the US, conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, between

Israel and Syria and Iran and between North and the US and South Korea.

Here is a recent anti-Marxist entry recorded by the American Enterprise Institute, a US free-market think tank, following the death of the historian and Stalinist apologist, Eric Hobsbawm:

Marx never doubted that history had a purpose, namely, the inevitable victory of communism, which, according to Marx, would bring the End of History—or, more precisely, an end to the nightmare of history, with its bloody wars and revolutions. The global triumph of Marxist communism would usher in the reign of perpetual peace that the German philosopher Immanuel Kant had hopefully prophesized in the heyday of the European Enlightenment.

For Marx and his early followers, such a lofty and noble end could justify a great deal of violence and bloodshed. But suppose they had been permitted a glimpse into the future and had seen for themselves that the violence and bloodshed would lead absolutely nowhere and that the great social experiment undertaken in Marx's name would result in genocide and ultimately in catastrophic collapse and ruin. What would they have said then?

<http://www.american.com/archive/2012/october/eric-hobsbawm-eugene-genovese-and-the-end-of-history>

Contrary to the author of the article, Marx did not believe “*history had a purpose*”. He said that history by itself does nothing and it was only the actions of men and women which changed society.

This is what Marx wrote rather than what the AEI claimed he wrote:

History does nothing, it 'possesses no immense wealth', it 'wages no battles'. It is man, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights; 'history' is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve its own aims; history is nothing but the activity of man pursuing his aims (THE HOLY FAMILY, 1846).

And it was a view Marx held on to all his working life. As the first volume of CAPITAL was being printed, Marx was presented with a copy of THE HOLY FAMILY by his friend Ludwig Kugelmann, and on reading this long-lost work he wrote in a letter to Engels, in April 1867, that he was:

“...pleasantly surprised to find we have no need to be ashamed of the piece” (cited in Paul Blackledge, REFLECTIONS ON THE MARXIST THEORY OF HISTORY, Manchester University Press, 2006).

And Marx never saw Socialism/Communism as “*the End of History*” but rather the end to “*all pre-history*”. He made this clear in the *Preface* to THE CONTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL ECONOMY (1859), when he wrote:

The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production - antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence - but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.

Instead of Socialism being “*The End of History*”, Marx saw the establishment of Socialism closing the “*prehistory of human society*”. For the first time in written human history, the social forces of production in a Socialist society would be in harmony with the social relations of production. Men and women would be free from the class ownership of the means of production and distribution on the one hand and social labour no longer divorced from direct access to production and distribution of social wealth on the other.

However, Marx's focus of attention in his writings was not a description of a Socialist Revolution *per se* nor a detailed specification of what a Socialist society might be like (he disavowed utopian speculation), but instead his interest focused in explaining the necessity for Social revolution and why the working class was a revolutionary force for social change. Marx gave no date for the Socialist revolution and he gave no time period for the establishment of Socialism. He was no prophet. And for a very good reason; both the establishment of Socialism and the Socialist revolution were contingent on the conscious and political action of a revolutionary working class.

Socialists are not obliged to give a date for the establishment of Socialism any more than we are obliged to give a

detailed specification of Socialist production and distribution. Time is on our side. Social reforms are not going to resolve endemic social and economic problems like periodic crises and depressions, poverty and social alienation now any more than they were in the 1930's.

What about time spans?

In Ice Age Neolithic limestone caves found in Northern Spain there are two paintings of a horse; the first was painted about 30,000 years ago the second was painted 13,000 years later (They were recently shown on BBC 2's CULTURE SHOW on February 9th 2013). There is 13,000 years difference between the two horse paintings but they stand only a few feet apart. Nevertheless the Neolithic community in the caves held together for a further 17,000 years after the painting of the second horse.

We sometimes forget social evolution has taken place over tens of thousands of years and the periodic revolutionary changes within history which replace one social system with another are a result of almost invisible changes taking place as the contradictions unfold between the forces of production and the class relations of production. Revolutions do seem to "*come out of the blue*".

The English Civil War from 1641 to 1652 seemed to people at the time as "*the world turned upside down*" because it was such an inexplicable and unfathomable event of which the historian, Christopher Hill wrote: "*men groped for new words to describe what they were experiencing*" ("*The word "Revolution*" in Christopher Hill, A NATION OF CHANGE AND NOVELTY, London, 1990 p.88). The French revolution of 1789 came as if from nowhere. The Russian Tsar looked politically secure up to 1914 but events moved fast against him once the disaster of the war with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire became apparent. The Holy Roman Empire lasted for nearly 1000 years but was thrown unceremoniously into the dustbin of history immediately after five years of European war during the end of the second decade of the 20th century.

We are not saying that it will take 30,000 years for Socialism to be established but an embryonic capitalism emerging in 17th century Britain is only five centuries old while a fully developed World Capitalism is just 200 years old. Even for Marx, writing in 1848, the capitalist class was barely one hundred years old although he noted that it had "*created more massive and more colossal productive forces than all preceding generations together*" (COMMUNIST MANIFESTO).

If Marx had looked into the future and saw what was carried out in his name he would say that there was nothing in his Socialist writings which could have remotely legitimised the anti-working class theories of Lenin and Trotsky, of Leninism, of the Bolshevik's *coup d'état* in 1917, of the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party and then Stalin's cult of personality with the subsequent gulags, political show trials, summary executions, genocide and totalitarianism. To borrow a phrase used by one of the characters, the reclusive artist, Frederick played by Max von Sydow in Woody Allen's film HANNAH AND HER SISTERS (1986), if Marx ever came back and saw what was being written in his name "*he would never stop throwing up*".

Remember, Marx had already made a telling comment about the cult of personality:

Neither of us (he includes Engels) cares a straw for popularity. A proof of this is for example, that, because of aversion to any personality cult, I have never permitted the numerous expressions of appreciation from various countries with which I was pestered during the existence of the International to reach the realm of publicity, and have never answered them, except occasionally by a rebuke. When Engels and I first joined the secret Communist Society we made it a condition that everything tending to encourage superstitious belief in authority was to be removed from the statutes (REMARKS AGAINST PERSONALITY CULTS from a letter to W. Blos 10 November 1877 quoted from Marxist.org)

Marx would have said of Russia between 1917 and 1991, as he did of those who produced "*Marxist writings*" in his own day: "*If this is Marxism then I am not a Marxist!*" And he would have drawn attention to a point he made as early as 1845:

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence (Marx and Engels, GERMAN IDEOLOGY, 1845).

And commenting further he said that the:

...development of productive forces (which implies the actual empirical existence of men in their world-historical, instead of local, being) is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it want is merely made general, and with destitution the struggle for necessities and all the filthy business would be necessary reproduced (ibid p. 53)

As Marx rightly pointed out Socialists have no interest in personality cults. Nor are Socialists interested in being popular for the sake of being popular. Socialists are guided by principles not opportunism. Socialists want intelligent men and women to become Socialists, workers who agree with the OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES and who are prepared to defend those principles against our opponents. The Socialist Party of Great Britain is a Party of equals.

What the SPGB produces, for example, as theory and as pamphlets and as articles are undertaken in the name of the Party as a whole not as the authorship of a particular member or group of members. Socialist ideas have no copyright and nor are they work of any one person. They are created by the material conditions of capitalism and derive from the class struggle.

And as far as the SPGB is concerned we do not accept as gospel everything Marx said or wrote in his life; nor do we treat him as a “*prophet*” who made mystical pronouncements about the future. Marx was a revolutionary Socialist who contributed a considerable body of scientific work to Socialist theory notably his insistence that the emancipation of the working class from capitalism had to be the work of the workers themselves; perhaps one of the most important political concepts in human history.

GREAT MEN AND WOMEN

Many thinkers and investigators in various fields of study have added their quota in social progress. They have acquired a greater insight into the workings of social and political events than their fellows and have passed this information on to help bring about a greater understanding of society and its development ... It is true that all these people were products of the material conditions of their time, but they were also a part of the material influences. All of them, however, could only work within the conditions and limits of their particular time.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM: A SOCIALIST ANALYSIS OF THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY pp 51-52 1975

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Preconditions for Socialism

Marx often used the expression “*contradiction*” in his writings. What did he mean? Marx’s conception of contradiction operated at the level of the system as a whole; the relationship, conflict, stress and dislocation between the forces of production and the social relations of production applicable to capitalism in particular. A contradiction for Marx is not a logical fallacy as in the case of formal logic but an outcome of problems within commodity production and exchange for profit itself.

Capitalism, through the imposition of the wages system, denies workers both their human creativity and direct access to what they and their families need to live and flourish as free human beings. The problem is confounded by labour power becoming a commodity and workers confronting what they produce as something alienating – a *fetish* – as

Marx called it. No reforms of the system can prevent the contradictions between what society could produce and what the market allows to be produced and the economic and social consequences which result from these contradictions.

Marx and Engels never held the view that the basic contradiction of the capitalist mode of production was the class struggle between the capitalist class and working class.

Nor did they see the class struggle as the general contradiction in history although they did view the class struggle as “*the motor force*” of history and of historical change.

Marx’s theory of history, known more popularly as the materialist conception of history saw the fundamental contradiction in history as the one between the development of the productive forces on the one hand and the existing class relations of production on the other.

The class struggle as well as periodic economic crises that occur within capitalism are not random events in themselves but occur because of the contradiction between the forces and class relations of production; a contradiction expressed in the increasingly socialised nature of production and the narrow private appropriation of social wealth.

The class struggle over the intensity and extent of exploitation, for example, signifies the fact that the wages system is a form of rationing where what men and women need to live women need to live fulfilling and worthwhile lives and what they can buy with their wages and salaries they receive are not the same thing.

Economic crises and trade depressions occur because “*the barrier to capital is capital itself*”. The forces of production including social and co-operative labour want to develop but they are constrained within the anarchy of commodity production and exchange for profit and this manifests itself in some or many businesses unable to find buyers; for production to be cut back, workers to become redundant, goods to stock pile, machinery to be underused or temporarily remain idle and commodities destroyed even though there is very real unmet human need society for food, clothes, shelter, medicine, transport and communication.

Here is Marx writing on crises in relation to the falling rate of profit:

... from time to time the conflict of antagonistic agencies finds vent in crises. The crises are always but momentary and forcible solutions of the existing contradictions. They are violent eruptions which for a time restore the disturbed equilibrium.

The contradiction, to put it in a very general way, consists in that the capitalist mode of production involves a tendency towards absolute development of the productive forces, regardless of the value and surplus-value it contains, and regardless of the social conditions under which capitalist production takes place; while, on the other hand, its aim is to preserve the value of the existing capital and promote its self-expansion to the highest limit (i.e., to promote an ever more rapid growth of this value). The specific feature about it is that it uses the existing value of capital as a means of increasing this value to the utmost. The methods by which it accomplishes this include the fall of the rate of profit, depreciation of existing capital, and development of the productive forces of labour at the expense of already created productive force (Capital Vol. 3 ch 15 EXPOSITION OF THE INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS OF THE LAW).

Capitalism forces production and distribution to conform to the narrow requirements of the market; of buying and selling not in meeting human need. Its economists claim that their subject matter is “*infinite wants pursuing finite scarcity of resources*” but it merely a convenient myth. There are basic human wants not being met and deliberate underuse of the forces of production including social labour but a minority capitalist class live a life of luxury and privilege where 1 per cent of the world’s population owns 40 per cent of its social wealth and the top 2% own half of all the world’s social wealth <http://www.shunpiking.com/ol0309/0309-WD-globalwealthstudy.htm>

Yet not only are billions of people; men, women and children, living in poverty and thousands dying each day due to lack of food but, in the second decade of the 21st century, just under a billion workers throughout the world are

unemployed including some 24 million in the Eurozone itself.

Capitalism is unable to develop the forces of production in a rational way. Marx made this point well in CAPITAL VOLUME III, when he discussed the cause of economic crises. He said that the contradiction between the forces and relations of production could not be abolished within capitalism, but instead the “*violent eruptions*” of that contradiction in general economic crises provided “*momentary and forcible solutions*” (For as a useful discussion on Marx’s use of contradiction in CAPITAL see L. Wilde’s MARX AND CONTRADICTION, ch. 5 Stresses and Crises pp. 72 –90, 1989).

Marx argued that capitalism was impelled by its “*own immanent laws*” of capital accumulation to drive on towards unlimited production, even though the profit system could only develop the forces of production on a “*restricted social foundation*” and was therefore constrained by “*narrow limits*”.

As Marx was to remark in THEORIES OF SURPLUS VALUE this was:

“..the deepest and most hidden cause of crises of the crying contradiction within which bourgeois production is carried on and which, even at a cursory glance, reveal it as only a transitional, historical form (Vol. 3. P. 84)

As to the narrow class relations of production unmet human need for the majority sits uneasily with the wealth and privilege of a capitalist minority out of whom, according to Oxfam, the top 100 billionaires received \$240 billion in 2012, that is, about 40% of the world’s entire wealth.

What of food production in relation to the contradiction at the heart of capitalism? The world produces 17% more food per person today than 30 years ago but close to a billion people go to sleep hungry every night (Oxfam 2012).

And the HUFFINGTON POST carried an article: “*We already grow enough food to feed 10 billion people*” in which the author Eric Gimenez, summarizing a report in NATURE wrote:

Hunger is caused by poverty and inequality, not scarcity. For the past two decades, the rate of global food production has increased faster than the rate of global population growth. The world already produces more than 1 ½ times enough food to feed everyone on the planet. That's enough to feed 10 billion people, the population peak we expect by 2050. But the people making less than \$2 a day -- most of whom are resource-poor farmers cultivating unviably small plots of land -- can't afford to buy this food (12.02.2012).

The problem of hunger is not a natural condition of human beings but instead a political question. The wrong social framework currently exists to resolve the problem of hunger. In fact, the problem of poverty and hunger derives from the minority ownership of the means of production and distribution and the division of the world into competing nation states. To resolve the very real problems of poverty hunger requires capitalism to be replaced with Socialism. That is; politics. But what governs the political process? How is Socialism achievable?

There is an important point made by Marx in THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE OF LOUIS BONAPARTE

(1852): *Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.*

Two important technical pre-conditions, then, have to exist before world Socialism is possible:

- * The development of the Forces of Production. There has to be the potential for meeting the needs of all society. Capitalist production and distribution woefully underproduces and wastes vast amounts of raw resources, production and labour, particularly in the commercial, State and military sectors of the economy. The profit motive works against meeting human need.

- * Social and co-operative Labour. There must be the technical ability of meeting human need; an educated workforce capable of working together to produce what is needed by society.

These pre-conditions were reached a long time ago. The forces of production, for over a century or more, has possessed the potential to resolve problems like poverty and world hunger but is constrained by the capitalist priorities of profit making and expanding capital as an anti-social objective in its own right.

Then, there is an important political precondition for world socialism to be possible and that is the formation of a Socialist majority. Without a Socialist majority existing within capitalism there is no practical way to establish Socialism. A Socialist majority has to take conscious and political action to establish Socialism. Understanding capitalism; accepting the need for Socialism and being prepared to politically establish Socialism are all essential attributes of a revolutionary working class.

And finally, a Socialist majority has to be focussed on democratically gaining political power through Parliament and the vote. And the revolutionary political action necessary for establishing Socialism can be summarised as follows:

- * Political action by a Socialist majority understanding and desiring Socialism has to be taken through a principled and democratic Socialist Party with Socialism and only Socialism as its object.

- * Socialists have to reject political leadership and think and act for themselves. This is not to say that Socialists cannot vote for delegates to make decisions on the basis of democratically arrived at instructions. A Socialist does not have to be implicitly involved in every decision making process however those entrusted in making decisions should be accountable and that there should be transparency and openness in the transmission of information, how decisions are reached and access to all the relevant information.

- * A Socialist majority has to use parliament as a revolutionary instrument to ensure the smooth transformation from capitalist production for profit to world-wide socialist production and distribution to meet human need. The necessity of a Socialist majority to gain control of the political machinery has been logical and consistent position of socialists and has come to politically define the Socialist Party of Great Britain from the Labour Party and its social reformism on the one hand and the capitalist Left with its direct action and so-called worker's councils on the other.

Once these preconditions have been met, a worldwide Socialist majority can go on to establish a classless, stateless, moneyless and democratic society. Production and distribution in common ownership will be democratically planned; and the forces of production extended and developed in line with environmental considerations to ensure all the needs of society will be met “*humanely and decently*” no matter where they exist in the world.

SO YOU WANT TO BECOME A SOCIALIST

Becoming a member of the Socialist party of Great Britain is not like joining any other political Party. The SPGB expects an applicant to understand, agree with and be able to defend the OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. This is to ensure that there is a common framework within the membership for the Party to take political action to put the case for Socialism and only Socialism.

If an applicant wants to join the SPGB then they will be sent a list of questions which arise out of the Party's OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. The party needs to satisfy itself of the competence of an applicant's view on reforms, other political parties, nationalisation, leadership, religion, nationalism, democratic movements and so on. These questions all relate to the OBJECT AND D OF P.

Reading Socialist literature will help in answering the questions. For a start, reading the pamphlet SOCIALISM VERSUS RELIGION, WAR, CAPITAL will instantly tell the reader why the Party does not allow any one holding religious beliefs from becoming a member. We reject religion as a personal belief and we see nothing but harm to the interest of the working class in the holding of religious ideas.

The SPGB has also produced a set of literature – pamphlets and our journal, SOCIALIST STUDIES – all on the web site and in hard copy which are required reading for anyone wanting to join the Party. This written material should be read and understood by the applicant before applying for membership. We also recommend texts by Marx and Engels, in particular, THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, WAGES PRICE AND PROFIT and SOCIALISM UTOPIAN

To take part in the political class struggle requires both socialist understanding and knowledge. If there is a question we are pleased to discuss. If there is a criticism we are interested in a debate. What we cannot do - and we have learnt this by bitter experience - is to let into the Party someone who has no grasp of the Socialist case against capitalism. This does not mean rejection by an applicant is final but that more reading and understanding is required before being allowed to join the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

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Capitalism's Future Wars

During the 20th century around 231 million people were killed by war (<http://www.cissm.umd.edu/papers/files/deathswarsconflictsjune52006.pdf>). In the 21st century capitalism has remained a social system of war, death and destruction. Conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and a host of smaller but no less destructive wars have scarred the planet. Add in the civil wars and over a million people have been killed in the last thirteen years, mostly civilians. 11,000 civilian deaths in Afghanistan since 2006 and 125,000 civilian deaths in Iraq from 2003 to 2013 while there have been over 100,000 deaths in Syria's two year civil war alone. And as one conflict recedes another begins.

And capitalist nation states are always in conflict with one another. In June 2013 the US and Philippine Navy took part in combined military sea manoeuvres in the Pacific Ocean in and around islands deeply disputed with China. The US and China are also at odds with each in Africa and South America over raw resources, trade routes and spheres of influence; all of which constitute the ingredients for war.

Away from China's expansion into the Indian Ocean, India has created tensions with Beijing by increasing its economic interests in the South China Sea and military ties with Vietnam; the main rival claimant to a body of water Beijing considers its sovereign territory.

In May 2013, Global Research reported that the US government had been developing a strategic partnership with India, aiming to use the country as a counterweight to China, whom Washington treats as its main rival in Asia. The US is trying to expand this integration of India into its strategic agenda in Asia into a quadrilateral alliance also including Australia.

The report goes on to say:

While the US encourages India to assert a more aggressive stance against China, India itself has concerns about the growing Chinese influence in South Asia, including building of port facilities in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. New Delhi sees China's clout as a factor undermining its own ambitions to emerge as a major power with US backing.

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/military-stand-off-between-china-and-russia/5333900>

The rivalry between China and India has been increased recently with the construction by the Chinese of a port at Colombo in Sri Lanka and other infrastructure projects throughout the country to give them strategic access to trade routes, raw resources and military influence all over the Indian Sea.

And according to the ECONOMIST:

Colombo is part of a "string of pearls"—an American-coined phrase that suggests the deliberate construction of a network of Chinese built, owned or influenced ports that could threaten India. These include a facility in Gwadar and a port in Karachi (both in Pakistan); a container facility in Chittagong (Bangladesh); and ports in Myanmar (June 8th 2013).

An Indian Defense Ministry report published in April 2013 warned of the “grave threat” posed by the military maneuvers of the Chinese navy near India’s maritime territories. China’s rapidly expanding submarine fleet — it counts 45 such vessels to India’s 14 — has widened its orbit of patrols beyond Chinese territorial waters. The “implicit focus” of China’s navy, the report suggests, is to try to gain control of “highly sensitive sea lines of communication” in the Indian Ocean. Last year alone, the Indian Defense Ministry documented 22 “contacts” in the Indian Ocean with vessels suspected to be Chinese attack submarines on extended patrol (TIME WORLDS 13th May 2013).

Will there be a war between China and India and China and the US? According to the academic, Professor Oliver Stuenkel:

China is busy creating alliances with India's neighbours, while India has - to China's dismay - begun to strengthen ties with Japan, Australia, and the United States. While trade between India and China is growing, this alone may not be enough to prevent an escalation - as World War I made abundantly clear. Similar to today's China and India, Imperial Germany felt "encircled" - a word analysts from both China and India use with growing frequency (<http://www.postwesternworld.com/2011/11/27/china-vs-india-will-the-contest-of-the-21st-century-lead-to-war/>)

Idealists and simple-minded authors like the evolutionary psychologist, Professor Steven Pinker (THE BETTWR ANGELS OF OUR NATURE: WHY VIOLENCE HAS DECLINED 2011) believes “*We are probably living in the most peaceful time in our species’ existence*”! But then, Professor Pinker does not live in Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan or in and around the South China Seas, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, or the other countries of the world in which war and conflict currently take place. How peaceful the world must look from the sedate and urbane setting of Harvard University. As a genetic determinist, Pinker also believes human beings are innately violent but he does not apply this conservative and misanthropic view of “*human nature*” to himself.

We are fast approaching the 100th anniversary of World War 1 in which the total number of military and civilian casualties was over 37 million. There were over 16 million deaths and 20 million wounded ranking it among the deadliest conflicts in human history WIKIPEDIA

Some ten years earlier the Socialist Party of Great Britain had noted:

We who are Socialists are all in favour of peace, but at the same time we recognise that so long as men live in societies based upon class opposition, in societies in which the mode of producing the material sustenance of man are monopolized by a class, so long will war be rife as a means of satisfying national disputes (SOCIALIST STANDARD, January 1905).

Capitalism as a system of barbarism was a perceptive view made by Rosa Luxemburg. At the beginning of the First World War she wrote:

Shamed, dishonoured, wading in blood and dripping in filth, this capitalist society stands, not as we usually see it, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, of ethics — as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity — so it appears in all its hideous nakedness ...A look around us at this moment shows what the regression of bourgeois society into barbarism means. This world war is a regression into barbarism (THE JUNIUS PAMPHLET).

For Luxemburg capitalism had regressed into barbarism and would continue this path of destruction if the working class failed to establish Socialism. It was left to the Socialist Party of Great Britain in the 1914 September edition of the SOCIALIST STANDARD to set out the Socialist case against capitalism’s war and to remind workers that:

... (their) interests are not bound up in the struggle for markets wherein their masters may dispose of the wealth they have stolen from them (the workers), but in the struggle to end the system under which they are robbed, they are not concerned with the present European struggle, which is already known as the “BUSINESS” war, for it is their masters’ interests which are involved, and not their own.

In holding nationalist ideas and erroneously believing they have interests identical with the capitalist class, workers

are easily led by politicians to kill each other over the battlefields of the world. Yet, workers do not own the means of production and distribution, nor do they own raw resources, nor have the need to protect trade routes and secure strategic points of influence. Workers have identical interests to work together with other workers no matter where they live and to consciously and politically replace capitalism and the barbarism of war with Socialism. War can solve no working class problem and undercuts the common interest of the world's working class.

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What We Said and When.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

LECTURE SERIES NOVEMBER 1986-MARCH 1987

WHAT WE SAID AND WHEN

CAMDEN AND NORTHWEST LONDON BRANCHES 1987

WHY LABOUR GOVERNMENTS FAIL

What We Said and When.

The evolution of the Labour Party is a practical confirmation of the theoretical case against reformism. With a working class that has never at any time understood or wanted socialism, the labour Party, instead of gradually transforming capitalism in the interest of the workers has itself been gradually transformed from a trade union pressure group into an instrument of capitalist rule (QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, March 1978).

We have no hope in Labour Governments or advice to offer to them; we do not hold that if they had been led by other men or had thought up other policies the outcome would have been significantly different. As socialists, our interest is in the vital issue of changing completely the economic structure of society (LABOUR GOVERNMENT OR SOCIALISM, February 1968).

A Labour Government is going to try to straddle the class struggle and to represent one at the same time the interests of the owning class! Labour supporters expectantly and hopefully await the outcome. Socialists do not need to wait to prophesy failure (SOCIALIST STANDARD, September 1945).

It is in this fact the explanation lies of the failure and the collapse of the Labour Party in 1931...Try as they might the Labour Party could not combat the laws of the capitalist system which over-rode its reformist theories and forced its actions to conform with them (SOCIALIST STANDARD, July 1942).

What They Said and When

Never has any previous Government done so much in so short a time to make modern capitalism work (sic). Rt. Hon. Douglas Houghton, Labour MP, 25th April 1967.

I want industry to be profitable. It is in your interest that industry should be profitable. I want British industry to be more profitable over the next 12 months than over that last 12 months (James Callaghan, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 4th October, 1967).

There is little sign that death duties are doing more than holding their own against private accumulation of wealth (Douglas Jay, Financial Secretary to the Treasury in Labour Government, 17th January 1950).

In the early weeks, Mr. Callaghan was much missed by the hungry sheep who have looked up and failed to see and hear him (Sir Harold Wilson on Callaghan's failure to make greater use of television, 17th February, 1979).

It is important for us to start and maintain a dialogue with both sides of industry in the run-up to the next election. Trade Unions have accepted my offer of talks over the next few months. If the Confederation of British Industry is sensible, they will not allow themselves to be left behind (Roy Hattersley, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, 26th October, 1985).

ONE IN THE EYE While Ed Miliband has pledged to take on the bankers and super-rich, former Labour Minister Shaun Woodward has other ideas, it seems

The super-wealthy member for St Helens South & Whiston – once reputed to be the only Labour MP with a butler – reveals in the latest register of MPs' interests that he also has a part-time job advising Reichmuth & Co, a Swiss private bank. Based in Zurich, Reichmuth handles the money of high-net worth individuals and promises "discretion" in a "traditional Swiss banker culture" because "money is – and will always be – a very personal matter".

The culture embraced by Woodward's new employer traditionally involves a big focus on avoiding tax. The bank's website also promises services in "tax optimisation" and "tax planning in the area of providence" to help clients enjoy their "wealth pyramid".

Woodward, who defected from the Tories to Labour in 1999 and became culture minister and secretary of state for Northern Ireland, expects to be paid "£35,000 a half year" for 10 days' work with the bankers. This will mean he will earn more from the Swiss bank than he does representing the people of Merseyside.
(PRIVATE EYE, 12 - 25th July 2013, p. 8)

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In Praise of Sloth

Are You Slothful?

Investors apparently view workers in Europe as "*slothful*" with a poor track record on productivity. This was the opinion taken by NEWS INVESTORS.COM (21. 2. 2013) who praised Jin Lique, chairman of the board of supervisors of China Investment Corp when he criticized European workers' "*slothful*" and "*indolent*" habits.

Boris Johnson picked-up on the criticism made by investors of the productivity of workers in the European Union. In his article, "*Quitting the EU won't solve our Problems*" (DAILY TELEGRAPH 13 May 2013) he lamented at the poor performance of workers in Britain compared to workers in Germany, a trend, he said, which had taken place for best part of a century. He roundly attacked workers in Britain for being "*slothful*" and wanting "*instant gratification*"

Already in full-time employment as Mayor of London, Johnson is paid £250,000 a year for writing just one article a week in the TELEGRAPH it appears hired gunslingers come at a considerable cost. But then his employers, the

Barclay brothers, can afford to be generous to those who are prepared to defend their class interests. At the last count, the twins were worth some £2.5 billion (TIMES RICH LIST 2012). Our political enemies have millions to spend on their lies while Socialists can just about afford the postage stamp for the truth.

Boris Johnson accused workers in Britain of being slothful but said little about the idleness of the capitalist class he writes for. Capitalists do not have to work. They live a life of privilege and luxury, living-off the unearned income of rent, interest and profit. They invest capital but the money they use to invest in companies and to buy the worker's mental and physical ability to work has only come from past exploitation of the working class; "*dead-labour*" as Marx called it. The working class not investors are the real wealth producers in society.

Marx called the capitalist class a mere "*personification of capital*"; nothing more than unnecessary parasites: "*Capital is dead labour, which vampire-like, lives only by sucking living-labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks*" (CAPITAL VOLUME 1). The capitalist class needs the working class but the working class does not need the capitalist class. A dog can live quite happily without the fleas on its body.

Wage slavery and degradation

Employers consider workers to be inherently lazy and given half the chance will "*swing the lead*". Employers and their politicians believe workers will find any excuse not to be employed. And well they might be right; who in their right mind wants to be employed? Marx gives an account of employment which has not been bettered:

...that within the capitalist system all methods for raising productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker; that all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become a means of domination and exploitation of the producers; they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, they destroy the actual content of his labour by turning it into a torment; they alienate from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they deform the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital (CAPITAL VOLUME 1 *The general Law of Capitalist Accumulation*, p. 799 Penguin1990).

Workers are forced into employment because they do not own the means of production and distribution. Whole tiers of managers and supervisors are employed just to make sure workers attend their place of work on time in the morning, work diligently during the working day and leave at the specified time in the evening. And employers always want higher productivity with fewer workers producing more commodities while being paid less.

Workers are never left alone. Attacks by employers on pay and conditions, restructuring and redundancy, the use of machinery to displace workers and the increasing pressure of competition with other workers renders employment often degrading, stressful and unpleasant.

What is wrong with being a sloth?

What is wrong with being a sloth? And what is wrong with being idle? Should we not be living in a slow, measured and stress-free society? Is slothfulness really a vice?

Johnson, as a classics scholar, should have read Paul Lafargue's THE RIGHT TO BE LAZY (Marxist.org) before denigrating "*sloth*". Lafargue pointed out:

The Greeks in their era of greatness had only contempt for work: their slaves alone were permitted to labour: the free man knew only exercises for the body and mind. And so it was in this era that men like Aristotle, Phidias, Aristophanes moved and breathed among the people; it was the time when a handful of heroes at Marathon crushed the hordes of Asia, soon to be subdued by Alexander. The philosophers of antiquity taught contempt for work that degradation of the free man, the poets sang of idleness, that gift from the Gods: O Melibae Deus nobis haec otia fecit

(*Oh Melibeus! A God has granted us this idleness: from Virgil's BUCOLICS AND ECLOGUES*).

Johnson is obsessed with the mystical breeding of money in the City of London and was once asked to debate with the reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain on account of his ignorant track record commenting on capitalism, Marx and Socialism. Unfortunately he declined the invitation due to his commitments on a Sunday afternoon; perhaps mowing the lawn, penning an article for his newspaper or indulging in an in-depth discussion on conservative social policy with the journalist Petronella Wyatt. Such a busy schedule left him no time to debate with a group of Marxists in Bloomsbury, Borough of Camden. More's the pity. He would have learnt more than reading NEWS INVESTORS.ORG.

Strivers and Shirkers?

When courting non-Socialist votes, politicians patronisingly refer to workers as “*hard working families*”. This condescending sneer was used at last year's Conservative Party Conference by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne to divide the working class into “*strivers*” and “*shirkers*”. According to Osborne, the “*hard working strivers*” walk past the homes of the “*stay-at-home shirkers*”; a vicious politics of hate to stigmatise the poor and the vulnerable.

“*Strivers yes; shirkers no!*” is the cry of vindictive politicians in an attempt to find convenient scapegoats for the marked shortcomings of capitalism. And now we have Boris Johnson berating “*slothful workers*” for underperforming. Yet, if the working class did not produce sufficient social wealth there would be no surplus value, no unearned income in the form of rent, interest and profit and no money to pay a class warrior £250,000 fee to defend the interests of the capitalist class. And the social wealth produced by the working class does increase and so does the unearned income going to the rich. The top one per cent, since the economic crisis began five years ago, has seen their wealth increase by £190b (TIMES RICH LIST). And they still want more.

Why give the capitalist class more and more? Socialists do not want employment, we do not want employers and we do not want a labour market with its competition and class exploitation. We do not want the degradation and imprisonment of the wages system. We do not want capitalism and the capitalist class. Instead, we want the freedom to be slothful, idle and playful. We want to change the world in a revolutionary way so it is fit for human beings. We do not want a world shaped by capital but one shaped democratically by free men and women.

The Right to be Lazy

Socialists are not alone in highlighting the misery of employment. The intensity and extent of exploitation is increasingly manifesting itself into an addiction of compulsive overwork where workers are pursued by employers across the day and night by e-mails, fax, text messages and mobile phone calls.

On trains going to and from work, workers are to be found self-absorbed in working on their lap-tops trying to finish that sales report or investment bid. There is no conversation in the carriage; just the tapping of keyboards and the constant ringing sound of mobile phones.

According to the TUC, workers, over and above the surplus labour time they give to employers during the paid working day, are now giving an extra 2 billion hours of free time to their employers in unpaid overtime (TUC 5th January 2012). Fear of losing their job forces workers to cede more and more time to employers.

In WORKING OURSELVES TO DEATH (1993), author Diane Fassel called this compulsive overwork the cleanest of all addictions:

Compulsive overwork is perhaps the only addiction supported by religion, education, business and society. Modern technology makes employees accessible 24 hours a day to their bosses and clients, and the operating philosophy at a lot of companies is that good workers never let up.

It is a state of affairs they do not have to put up with. There is an alternative: Socialism. On our walls we should pin two slogans; a warning sign about the present and a one offering hope for the future:

Our epoch has been called the century of work. It is in fact the century of pain, misery and corruption.
Paul Lafargue, THE RIGHT TO BE LAZY

And

Let us be lazy in everything, except in loving and drinking, except in being lazy.
Gotthold Lessing

If we have to work in Socialism let it be an act of pleasure not drudgery; a creative celebration of being human rather than a brutal necessity of nature. We may not be able to get rid of all the “*dirty work*” but the goal in a Socialist society should be to drive down unpleasant tasks to a minimum.

In Socialism we will no doubt use machinery, computers, robotics, and nano technology to reduce labour to the minimum; producing things of use to last, to be admired and to be cherished. Creativity, meeting human need, and engagement in the democratic affairs of society would set Socialism apart from the stress, competition and exploitation of capitalism in its ruthless drive to accumulate capital and expand value.

Let Socialism be a world of deckchairs, of hammocks rocking in the wind and of walks through the countryside. Let us remember the sloth; the gentlest of creatures as a symbol to the way we should live rather than as we do today at the end of the whip of wage slavery.

Boris Johnson plays the affable buffoon but he is in reality a spiteful class warrior. He dines with the rich at fashionable London restaurants. He knows “*investors*” want more intensive exploitation of the working class because under capitalism capital accumulation and profit-making is the name of the game. He is a free trade and free market fanatic who believes capitalism is the best of all possible worlds, which for Johnson and the class he represents is certainly the case.

Workers should treat Boris Johnson and politicians like him with contempt they deserve. The answer to the spite of capitalist politicians is not to vote for them. Establish Socialism and get rid of the un-productive class who pay sycophants and apologists their “*bounty*” to rubbish our class. We want freedom from capitalism and the right to be lazy.

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Religion and Work

What of religion and work? A useful overview has recently been given by Dr. Robert. B. Hill who has traced the way work has changed from tribal systems through to slave societies, feudalism and capitalism (see HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE WORK ETHIC, 1992 <http://coe.uga.edu>). Most organized religions have considered work as a curse to be avoided by the ruling class but a necessity born out of “*original sin*” for a subject class.

Dr. Hill, for example, pointed out that traditional Judeo-Christian myths stated that sometime after the creation, a fictional Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden “*to work it and take care of it*” (Genesis 2:15, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION OF THE BIBLE, 1973). This biblical utopia ended in sin – perhaps the most misanthropic and anti-human story ever invented by theologians - and Adam and Eve were ejected from the Garden. Genesis 3:19 described the human plight from that time on:

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (NIV loc cit, 1973).

This became standard advice from the clerics to those forced to work for a living, particularly during the rise of capitalism. The Protestant writer Richard Baxter wrote to the faithful in 1670:

*Be sure that you keep yourself constantly employed (as far as your strength will bear) in the diligent labours of a lawful calling; and spend none of your precious time in idleness.... and perform your labours with holy minds*HE SIGNS AND CAUSES OF MELANCHOLY pp104-5)

A century later, William Wilberforce, best remembered for his anti-slavery reforms, wrote of the working class:

That their more lowly path has been allotted them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties and contentedly to bear its inconveniences... (PRACTICAL VIEW OF THE SYSTEM OF CHRISTIANITY)

Lord Wilberforce did not extend his abolition of slavery to wage slavery and on behalf of the employers took an active part in the creation of the Combination Acts of 1799 – 1800.

Another academic, Dr. M. Rose remarked that the Hebrew belief system viewed work as a "*curse devised by God explicitly to punish the disobedience and ingratitude of Adam and Eve*" (REWORKING THE WORK ETHIC: ECONOMIC VALUES AND SOCIO-CULTURAL POLITICS, London 1985, p. 28). Of course, "*Adam's curse*" as never meant to apply to Popes, Bishops, Kings and Queens, Princes and Lords any more than it was later to apply to the capitalist class who lived off the unearned income of rent, interest and profit. Ruling classes always had a subject class to work for them and religion was a useful institution to teach various subject classes; whether peasants, serfs, slaves or workers to endure work.

Ironically, the most devout believers in "*Adam's curse*" were, at least from the 1830's onwards, simultaneously both political economists and parsons. In their text books on the free market and from the pulpit, parsons preached to the Labouring classes the "*virtue*" of paid employment while, themselves enjoying a rarified existence as Fellows at Oxbridge colleges. Some members of the clergy were luckier still in their comfortable appointments.

Parson Malthus, for example, was given a sinecure and a good living at Hailybury College, Ware, teaching, at the behest of the East India Company, future administrators of institutional plunder and pillage.

For an historical overview of the East India Company it is worth reading Marx's, *The East India Company – its History and Results written for the New York Tribune* in 1853 (Marx and Engels Collected works, Volume 12, p. 148 Marxist.org/archive/Marxworks) and his comments on the East India Company in CAPITAL (p. 917). A more recent study of the East India Company has been written by the historian, Nick Robins; THE CORPORATION THAT CHANGED THE WORLD: HOW THE EAST INDIA COMPANY SHAPED THE MODERN MULTINATIONAL (Pluto Press 2006).

The work ethic

Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue wrote an entertaining pamphlet THE RIGHT TO BE LAZY (1883) which pointed out that among other things:

A strange delusion possesses the working classes of the nations where capitalist civilization holds its sway. This delusion drags in its train the individual and social woes which for two centuries have tortured sad humanity. This delusion is the love of work, the furious passion for work, pushed even to the exhaustion of the vital force of the individual and his progeny. Instead of opposing this mental aberration, the priests, the economists and the moralists have cast a sacred halo over work.

And he went on to conclude:

Blind and finite men, they have wished to be wiser than their God; weak and contemptible men, they have presumed to rehabilitate what their God had cursed. I, who do not profess to be a Christian, an economist or a moralist, I appeal from their judgement to that of their God; from the preachings of their religious, economics or free thought

ethics, to the frightful consequences of work in capitalist society.

A brief comment should be made about the “*protestant work ethic*” first put forward by Max Weber (THE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM, 1904) and then by R. H. Tawny (RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM, 1926). Both writers tried to replace Marx’s account of capitalism as an historical outcome of class struggle located around the social relations of production and the forces of production with their own idealistic conception of history.

Weber rejected the class struggle as the motor force of history. He held that cultural ideas by themselves changed one social system to the next; a fallacious view of social change which Marx called “*idealism*” Idealists put ideas first. For Weber religion was a primary pre-condition for capitalism not the exhaustion and impasse of feudal social relations of production preventing the further development of the forces of production. Weber claimed that it was the idea of the “*work ethic*” associated with the new idea of asceticism advocated by Luther and Calvin that changed feudal society to a capitalist society.

For Weber ideas were the prime cause of social and historical change. Weber, as a supporter of the profit system, wanted to retain capitalism not to change it. He compared wealthy Catholics in Italy and Spain with a rising Protestant class of merchants and businessmen in Germany and Holland. Catholics, he thought, just amassed wealth to spend on luxury living.

In contrast, the Protestants had a fixation about going either to heaven or to hell, ploughed their profits back into their businesses and farms. Unlike the wealthy Catholics, these pre-determinists believed it was sinful to enjoy themselves. As a result, the Protestant merchants and industrialists got richer and richer. This Weber said, accounted for the development of capitalism; the protestant work ethic.

Weber was wrong in a way that he ignored the relation between the material forces of production and religion. He was also wrong to say that Protestantism led to the development of capitalism. Jews, for example had long been money lenders and bankers while Catholic and Dutch bankers also predominated in Europe. There was also banking and commerce throughout the Middle East.

And when did the ruling class ever need an “*ethic*” to work? Slaves, peasants and workers did and still do the work. Weber made a logical error. He inverted the real relationship between economics and religion. For Weber economic relations were treated as the outcome of religious relations.

A more useful approach was offered by Engels in his pamphlet SOCIALISM: UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC; Engels discussed the German Reformation, Lutherism, Calvinism the Protestantism of Henry VIII’s England all within, what he termed “*historical materialism*”. Engels’ historical materialism was a view of the course of history:

which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggles of these classes against one another (p. 17 Progress Publishers 1978).

This is not to reject the influence of religious ideas – and Engels in his section on religion is alive to this fact - but they have to be placed within a historical context and within the economic development of society. Engels points out that the rising capitalist class fought their class struggle with feudalism through religion and religious ideas over several centuries.

Even Tawny admits against Weber that one of the principle reasons for the development of capitalism in Holland and England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was because of the primary role of economic factors (RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM p.321).

Incidentally, Tawny held the fallacious view that Marx’s Labour Theory of Value derived from “*the doctrines of Aquinas*” (p 48). Aquinas argued for a “*Just Price*” but Marx ridiculed this idea. The extraction of surplus value took place on the basis of equivalents; the commodity, labour power sold for an agreed wage and labour time sold for an

agreed period of time. Cheating or unfairness does not enter into the equation.

The working class were exploited because they produced the value of the wages and salaries during six hours of an eight hour working week but then went on to produce a surplus value in the remaining two hours. This surplus value went into the production of commodities and was realised as profit when sold.

Material Grounding of Work

Marx and Engels were of the opinion that human society is based on material forces. In other words, in order for any human society to exist, humans must produce the necessities of life which enable us to survive: food, shelter, water, etc. These are material things without which we would die out. But the way we interact to produce these necessities, who controls the products of our labour and how they use them, determines the type of society we live in.

A historical reading of the genesis of capital rather than the myths spun by Weber shows that the Catholic bankers and Merchants of Northern Italy certainly did not behave the way Weber believed they did. The Medici's built their palaces and indulged themselves as connoisseurs and patrons of the arts but they were also astute bankers and businessmen.

In fact capitalist production developed the earliest in Italy with the transformation of the serfs into a "free" proletariat. However, at the end of the 15th century developments in capitalism "*annihilated northern Italy's commercial supremacy*" (Marx, CAPITAL VOL 1 p. 876).

Someone's religious belief does not predispose them from becoming or not becoming a capitalist and asceticism is not necessary a capitalist virtue although Marx made a connection between Puritism and money in the "*Chapter on Money*" in the GRUNDRISSE:

The cult of money has its asceticism, in its self-denial, its self-sacrifice – economy and frugality, contempt for mundane, temporal and fleeting pleasures. Hence the connection between English Puritanism, or also Dutch Protestantism, and money making (p.232).

Protestant Germany came late on the capitalist scene despite the ideas of Calvin and Luther. In Britain, capitalism had started earlier but Adam Smith's original audience for the doctrines of free trade and the free market, which he had set out in his WEALTH OF NATIONS, were the sons from the very wealthy aristocratic families of Edinburgh not the "*butcher, the baker and the candlestick-maker*".

The capitalist class did not have to read the WEALTH OF NATIONS to become capitalists any more than the capitalist class in Germany developed either because of Luther's strictures against usury or Calvin's doctrine of pre-destination; they became capitalists, as Marx noted, by coming into the world "*dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt*" (CAPITAL VOLUME 1 p.926). Turbulence and strife announced capitalism not religious piety.

Take for example the Quakers and their relationship with the development of capitalism in Britain. An understanding of the Quakers, their politics and the rise of capitalism has been set within Marx's theory of history by historians such as Christopher Hill, E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm and Eric Williams.

The Quaker family businesses played a conspicuous role in the genesis of capitalism. The result was to be an array of powerful capitalist financial institutions and companies, including Barclays and Lloyds Banks, Allen and Hanbury pharmaceuticals, Huntley and Palmers biscuits, Cadburys, Frys and Rowntrees chocolate, Bryant and May matches, Clark's shoes, Wedgwood china, Rickitt's "*Blue*", and Truman and Hambury's breweries.

Yet the wealth going to the Quaker families came from the exploitation of wage labour and slavery. Quakers may have set up capitalist companies but the wealth being generated in them came from the exploitation of the workers they employed. Workers, then as now, were paid less in wages and salaries than the social wealth they actually produced in production – the production of "*surplus value*" as Marx called it.

Influential Quakers may have increasingly advocated anti-slavery during the latter half of the 18th century but they have never called for the end of wage-slavery. And it does not matter a jot if a capitalist is a “philanthropist” like the Cadbury’s and the Fry’s, or not; they nevertheless all live off the unearned income of rent, interest and industrial profit.

The Primitive Accumulation of Capital

And then there is the question of slavery and its association with what Marx called “*the primitive accumulation of capital*” – the historical precondition for capitalism to have sufficient capital to exploit the working class in order to produce more capital as a self-expanding anti-social objective in its own right. In CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY (1944) Eric Williams pointed out that in 1756 there were 84 Quakers listed in a Company trading to Africa including the Barclays and Baring families (p 43). In Liverpool especially, slave traders founded major banks or those associated with the trade. Men who had accumulated their capital in the African trade in 1753 founded Heywood Bank. The Leyland’s were another family of slave traders turned bankers. The Barclays traded slaves in 1756 before establishing their bank, one of the largest in Britain today.

Banks were also established in Manchester and Glasgow, both closely connected with the cotton trade, and hence with slavery, and in Bristol and London, both competing with Liverpool before the 1770’s for control of the slave trade (see Teresa Frizell, RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON ERIC WILLIAMS’ CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY recent Scholarship on Eric Williams’ Capitalism and Slavery, 2004). And Liverpool found its champion of slavery in the likes of the Reverend Raymond Harris, a clergyman in the Church of England, who defended slavery in a pamphlet published in 1788 with the title “*Scriptural Researches of the Licitness of the Slave trade showing its conformity with the principles of Natural and revealed Religion, delineated in the sacred writings of the Word of God*” (cited in CHRISTIANITY, SLAVERY AND LABOUR, C. Cohen 1931).

The Atlantic trade, based on slavery, played a critical role in British industrialization. There is a great deal of recent research evidence to support the theory that the timing and pattern of the Industrial Revolution was significantly affected by the slave trade among the other factors noted by Marx in his chapter on *The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist* CAPITAL vol. 1 pp. 914-926).

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population in that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, the conversion of Africa into the preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production CAPITAL VOL 1 ch31p. 915).

For modern confirmation of Marx see, for example two recent books on slavery and the primitive accumulation of capital by the historian, Robin Blackburn; THE MAKING OF NEW WORLD SLAVERY: FROM THE BAROQUE TO THE MODERN, 1492-1800 (1997) and The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights (2013).

Without question, the slave trade drove urbanization, commercialization, and industrialization in Europe; and Britain was placed politically to take full advantage of it. Not only does this refute the whimsical claims that religion was a primary force in the development of capitalism but it also undermines the conservative claim that the origin of the industrial revolution was a benign series of events in human history.

The protestant work ethic, as conceived by Weber, was a myth. Ideas do not exist in isolation from the conditions in which people live and work. In fact the ideas held by Calvin and Luther regarding work arose precisely because of changes in the material conditions of Europe as Feudalism began to give way to capitalism. The motor force of history was not the generation of ideas *per se* but the class struggle informed by Feudalism becoming, as capitalism was later to become, “*a fetter on production*”.

What of Socialism and work? Work in Socialism will be carried out by free and voluntary labour. Work will not be an act of coercion but an act of liberation and creativity meeting a basic human need denied by the labour market,

employment and the wages system. As William Morris wrote “*socialism is to substitute the relation of persons to persons for the relations of things to persons*” in which there would be “*neither master nor master’s men, neither idle nor overworked, neither brain-sick brain workers, nor heartsick handworkers...*” (quoted in THINKING HANDS, P. Katz, p.280, 2005).

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You're Fired: Nothing Personal You Realise

A new word has entered the economic dictionary; “*demising*”. The word first came to people’s attention when it was used by senior bosses at HSBC to sack 1,000 workers and “*restructure*” thousands more into new jobs for lower pay and worse working conditions. Being sacked is a fact of life for workers. And employers try to hide the pain of anguish of having to sack someone by using management-speak euphemisms. Barclays’ finance Chief Chris Lucas recently used the term “*rightsizing*” to describe plans to axe 3,700 jobs (DAILY MAIL 25th April 2013). Workers are now routinely “*stream-lined*”, “*rationalised*”, “*delayed*” and “*restructured*”. Of course it’s not the worker but the post which is being “*demised*” or *deleted*”. The post is no longer profitable so it is scratched. For the employer, the fact that a worker has lost their livelihood is neither here nor there. The bottom line is all that counts.

While HSBC were “*demising*” their employers, the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, designed by the architect James Stirling and constructed, it appears, by no one, held an exhibition “FLUXUS! ANTIKUNST” IS AUCH KUNST (“Fluxus! *Anti-Art*” is also *Art*) charting the history of artistic dissent against the production of art as rarefied commodities. One exhibit caught the eye. It was of two photographs; one next to the other, carefully staged by the artist to donate the passing of time. The work was entitled “*You’re fired: Nothing personal, you realise*” (illustrated on p66. in the published catalogue) and were taken by the artist Dick Higgins. The first photograph showed a worker – a salesman – looking glum and worried at the time of being fired from his job and then another photograph of the same worker later shown smiling after being told that, although he has just lost his job, there was nothing personal about it.

Of course there is nothing pleasant about losing a job no matter what the process is called to consign the worker into what Marx called “*the industrial reserve army*” of the unemployed. The reality of economic life for workers is that in a competitive capitalist economy if they are not profitable to employ they will be either fired, made redundant or unemployed. However, the political question which faces workers is not the question of unemployment – the hazard of being a wage slave - but being employed at all. Workers are employed, forced onto the labour market to sell their ability to work for a wage and salary, and exploited in the production process by producing more social wealth than they receive in wages and salaries because the means of production and distribution is owned by the capitalist class. Marx urged workers to look beyond employment and the wage packet and organise in a Socialist party to consciously and politically abolish the wages system altogether. Socialism, for the capitalist class would mean losing its power and privilege - it is nothing personal, you realise.

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Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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